



Beyond the Death of the Author: Posthuman Authorship and AI in *Death of an Author*

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Abstract— The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence has significantly transformed contemporary literary production, challenging traditional notions of creativity, authorship, and textual authority. This paper examines the emergence of posthuman authorship through an analysis of *Death of an Author*, an experimental novella created by Aiden Marchine. The novella is a combination of human imagination and AI-generated text. By situating the work within posthumanist discourse, the study explores how AI-mediated writing disrupts the conventional model of the individual human author and introduces a hybrid form of literary creation in which agency is distributed between human and machine. The title of the novella directly invokes the influential theoretical framework proposed by Roland Barthes, whose concept of the “death of the author” questioned the authority of the author as the ultimate source of textual meaning. In the context of AI-generated literature, this metaphorical death gains a new dimension as algorithmic systems actively participate in the generation of narrative content. Drawing on posthumanist theories developed by scholars such as Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, the paper argues that *Death of an Author* exemplifies a shift toward distributed creativity and collaborative authorship between humans and intelligent machines. Through a critical examination of the text’s production process and narrative structure, the study highlights how AI-assisted writing challenges long-standing assumptions about originality, intentionality, and literary agency.



Keywords— Artificial Intelligence, Authorship, Death of the Author, Identity, Posthumanism

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, literature has been understood as the product of human imagination and intentionality, where the author occupies a central position in the creation and interpretation of meaning. With the emergence of AI-assisted writing systems, this assumption is increasingly challenged. Generative language models like ChatGPT are now capable of producing coherent narratives, poems, and essays, thereby complicating the conventional understanding of literary creativity. One of the most notable examples of this phenomenon is *Death of an Author*, an experimental work by Stephen Marche that

explores the implications of machine-generated storytelling and the changing role of the human writer in the age of AI.

1.1 Death of an Author

Death of an Author represents a significant experiment in AI-assisted literary production. The novella was created through the collaboration between the author and AI tools like ChatGPT and Sudowrite, with 95 percent portion of the text generated through machine learning systems. Rather than presenting a conventional narrative structure, the work functions as both a literary text and a cultural commentary on the future of writing. The story centres on

the literary world and reflects the anxieties surrounding the growing influence of artificial intelligence in creative industries. By allowing AI to generate large portions of the narrative, Marche deliberately blurs the boundary between human and machine authorship. The novella therefore raises critical questions about originality, intentionality, and the ownership of creative work. The novella serves as an important example of how emerging technologies are reshaping the process of storytelling and the status of the author in contemporary literature.

1.2 “The Death of the Author”

The title of the novella directly references the influential theory proposed by Roland Barthes in his essay “The Death of the Author.” In his essay, Barthes challenges the traditional view that the author’s intentions determine the meaning of a literary text. Instead, he argues that meaning is produced through the interaction between the text and its readers (Barthes, 1997). According to Barthes, the authority of the author must be removed in order to allow the text to exist as a space of multiple interpretations. (Barthes, 1997) This theoretical shift moves critical attention away from the biography and intentions of the writer and toward the linguistic and cultural structures within the text itself. In the context of AI-generated literature, Barthes’ concept gains renewed relevance, as the process of writing is no longer limited to a single human creator. When machines participate in generating textual content, the notion of a stable, individual author becomes even more uncertain.

1.3 Posthumanism

The changing nature of authorship in AI-generated literature can also be understood through the framework of posthumanism. Posthumanist theory questions the centrality of the human subject and examines how technological developments are transforming the boundaries between humans and machines. Scholars such as Rosi Braidotti argues that contemporary society is increasingly characterized by hybrid forms of identity and agency that involve both human and nonhuman actors (Braidotti, 2013). Similarly, N Katherine Hayles suggests that cognition and creativity are distributed across networks that include technological systems as well as human participants (Hayles, 1999). Within this theoretical context, AI-generated literature represents a form of posthuman creativity in which literary production emerges from collaborative interactions between human writers and intelligent machines. The emergence of such hybrid forms of authorship challenges traditional human-centred models of creativity and invites scholars to reconsider the nature of literary production in the digital age.

II. DISCUSSION

Death of an Author operates as both a narrative and a meta-critical reflection on authorship, particularly when read through the framework of Roland Barthes’s theory of the “death of the author.” The novella’s central plot revolves around the mysterious death of Peggy Fermin, a writer, and the investigative journey of Gus Dupin, functions not merely as a detective narrative but as an allegory for interpretive practice itself. Gus Dupin’s role as a reader-detective who deciphers clues embedded within Fermin’s texts mirrors Barthes’ assertion that meaning is not fixed by the author but actively produced by the reader (Barthes 142). The act of reading becomes an act of reconstruction, where the author’s intention is secondary to the interpretive agency of the reader.

Fermin’s death is symbolically significant in this context. It can be read as a literalization of Barthes’ metaphorical claim: the author must “die” for the text to live. However, the novella complicates this idea by introducing AI as a co-producer of textual meaning. If Barthes sought to liberate the text from the authority of the author, Marche’s experiment disperses authorship even further, making it impossible to attribute the text to a singular, stable origin. The use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and Sudowrite in generating approximately 95% of the text disrupts the notion of intentional authorship, replacing it with a model of procedural and probabilistic text production.

Death of an Author can be read as a sustained interrogation of authorship, particularly when situated within the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes’s “Death of the Author.” The narrative of Peggy Fermin’s death and Gus Dupin’s investigation functions not merely as a detective plot but as a metaphor for interpretive practice. Dupin, in deciphering clues embedded within Fermin’s writings, assumes the role of the reader-critic who constructs meaning from textual fragments. This aligns with Barthes’ argument that meaning is not determined by authorial intention but produced through the act of reading (Barthes 142). The text, therefore, becomes a site of plurality, open to multiple interpretations rather than a fixed expression of a singular authorial voice. Peggy Fermin’s struggle with her holographic avatar introduces an additional layer to this theoretical framework. Her anxiety about becoming a technological reproduction reflects a deeper tension between individuality and mediation. The avatar represents a duplication or even displacement of the authorial self, suggesting that identity in the digital age is no longer stable or singular. Her insistence on preserving selfhood foregrounds the limits of authorial control in a technologically mediated environment. In this sense, Fermin’s “death” can be read symbolically as the dissolution of the traditional author figure, reinforcing

Barthes' claim that the author's authority must recede for the text to generate meaning independently.

The use of AI tools in the production of the novella where approximately 95% of the content is machine-generated further destabilizes the concept of authorship. Stephen Marche's decision to publish under the pseudonym "Aidan Marchine" complicates the question of authorial identity, transforming it into a constructed and performative entity. Authorship here is no longer a fixed origin but a distributed function, emerging from the interaction between prompts, algorithms, and editorial intervention. Thus, the novella extends Barthes' theory into the digital age, where the "death" of the author is not merely theoretical but materially enacted through technological processes. The pseudonymous attribution to "Aidan Marchine" further destabilizes authorial identity. The name itself becomes a constructed entity, much like the text it produces. In this sense, authorship in the novella is not eliminated but decentred and fragmented, aligning with Barthes' vision of the author as a "scriptor" who assembles pre-existing linguistic codes rather than originating meaning. The narrative's structure marked by interpretive gaps, stylistic inconsistencies, and layered clues reinforces the idea that meaning emerges through reading rather than authorial design. Thus, *Death of an Author* does not merely illustrate Barthes' theory; it extends it into the algorithmic age, where authorship becomes a distributed function across human and machine systems.

2.1 Posthumanism Authorship and Distributed Creativity

While Barthes provides a foundational framework for understanding the decentring of the author, the novella's engagement with artificial intelligence necessitates a posthumanist reading. Posthumanism, as articulated by thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, challenges the primacy of the human subject and emphasizes the role of nonhuman agents in cultural production. In *Death of an Author*, the creative process itself becomes a site of posthuman interaction, where human intention and machine generation intersect to produce literary meaning. The collaboration between Stephen Marche and AI systems exemplifies what Hayles describes as distributed cognition, where thinking and creativity are not confined to the human mind but are extended across technological networks (Hayles, 1999). The AI does not merely assist the author; it actively generates narrative possibilities, stylistic variations, and textual patterns. Marche's role shifts from that of a traditional author to that of a curator, editor, and orchestrator of machine output. This reconfiguration of creative roles illustrates a posthuman model of authorship, where agency is shared between human and nonhuman

actors. Furthermore, the novella's thematic engagement with creativity and originality reflects broader posthuman concerns. Marche's argument that originality has long been in decline, and that contemporary culture often relies on repetition and remixing, aligns with posthumanist critiques of the myth of individual genius. His comparison of AI-generated writing to the evolution of hip-hop is particularly significant: both rely on recombination, sampling, and transformation rather than pure originality. In this sense, AI writing is not an anomaly but an extension of existing cultural practices.

The figure of the AI in the novella can also be understood as an alien yet generative presence, one that produces language without consciousness or lived experience. This challenges traditional humanist assumptions that literature must be rooted in subjective experience. Instead, the novella suggests that meaning and aesthetic value can emerge from nonhuman processes of pattern recognition and statistical inference. As Braidotti argues, the posthuman condition involves a shift toward recognizing the agency of nonhuman entities within cultural systems (Braidotti 2013). *Death of an Author* embodies this shift by presenting AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as a collaborator with its own distinct capabilities. While Barthes' framework helps to understand the decentering of authorship, the novella's engagement with artificial intelligence and digital identity calls for a posthumanist interpretation. Posthumanism, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, challenges the centrality of the human subject and emphasizes the role of nonhuman agents in shaping cognition, identity, and creativity. In *Death of an Author*, Peggy Fermin's interaction with her holographic avatar becomes a powerful representation of this shift.

The avatar can be understood as a posthuman extension of the self, blurring the boundary between human identity and technological reproduction. Fermin's fear of being reduced to a technological construct reflects a broader cultural anxiety about the loss of autonomy in the digital age. However, the narrative does not present this transformation as entirely negative. Instead, it opens up a critical space to question whether such fears are universally valid or whether they stem from a residual attachment to humanist notions of individuality. The text thus invites readers to reconsider identity as a fluid and networked construct, rather than a fixed and autonomous essence.

From a posthuman perspective, creativity itself becomes distributed across human and machine systems. As N Katherine Hayles argues, cognition and meaning-making processes are not confined to the human mind but are extended through interactions with technological systems

(Hayles 1999). This is evident in Marche's writing process, where AI-generated outputs are curated and shaped by human intervention. The resulting text is neither fully human nor entirely machine-generated but a hybrid product of collaborative intelligence. Marche's reflections on creativity challenge the notion of originality as a purely human attribute. By comparing AI-generated writing to cultural forms such as hip-hop where repetition and remixing are central, the novella situates AI within a broader tradition of creative recombination. This perspective aligns with Rosi Braidotti's view that the posthuman condition involves rethinking creativity as an emergent property of complex systems rather than the expression of individual genius (Braidotti 2013). AI, in this context, is not a threat to artistic production but a new medium with distinct affordances and limitations.

III. CONCLUSION

Through its experimental form and thematic concerns, *Death of an Author* exemplifies the convergence of poststructuralist and posthumanist thought in the age of artificial intelligence. By extending Barthes' theory into the realm of algorithmic writing and situating authorship within a network of human-machine collaboration, the novella challenges deeply ingrained assumptions about creativity, originality, and literary authority. It ultimately invites readers to reconsider not only who or what can be an author, but also how meaning is produced in an increasingly posthuman cultural landscape. Through its exploration of authorship, identity, and technological mediation, *Death of an Author* brings together poststructuralist and posthumanist concerns in a compelling manner. By extending Roland Barthes's critique of authorial authority into the realm of AI-generated writing and engaging with posthumanist notions of distributed agency and hybrid identity, the novella challenges deeply rooted assumptions about creativity and selfhood. Peggy Fermin's struggle with her holographic avatar, alongside the collaborative production process involving AI, underscores the transformation of both authorship and identity in the digital age. Ultimately, the text positions literature as a dynamic and evolving practice, shaped not only by human intention but also by the complex interplay of technological systems and interpretive communities. Whatever developments happened, even if the shift from human centric to AI centric writings, the reality is that through this novel we can understand that for a creative idea, a human mind is needed. AI can elaborate the idea which the human creates. The novel is a perfect example of this idea. AI can help the author suffering from writer's block.

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